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ABSTRACT

The conversational language of 28 men and women born in Maine around the beginning of this century is described and analyzed as it relates to Lakoff's hypotheses in "Language and Women's Place." Transcripts were gathered by students as part of an interdisciplinary course, Women of Maine. Results indicated that there is a traditional language used by women which is more "evaluative-flowery," more polite, more tentative, and more qualified than the language used by men. Some of the women interviewed resorted to a sterile, neutral language. The men interviewed spoke in absolutes, without qualifiers and with few tag questions. The fact that language reflects women's place in society was manifest not so much in word choice as in calls for validation, the use of qualifiers, and the attitude that women's work outside the home is less important than men's. The traditional language used to talk about women defined women and their expected role; the traditional language used by women reinforced these definitions. These two factors seemed to result in a low self-concept which may be part of the accepted image and role of women born in Maine around 1900. (Author/AA)

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A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE LANGUAGE OF MEN AND WOMEN BORN IN MAINE AROUND 1900 AS IT REFLECTS THE LAKOFF HYPOTHESES IN "LANGUAGE AND WOMEN'S PLACE

A Paper
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This paper will describe a study of the conversational language of 28 men and women born in Maine around the beginning of the Twentieth Century. The study was conducted in interdisciplinary course, Women of Maine: An Autobiographical Approach, September 1974 to May 1975. Two interviews included in the study were conducted by the author during the summer of 1975.

There are certain limitations of the study that should be noted. The number of subjects is small and specialized. A descriptive-case study method was used, therefore the conclusions and observations are generalized and not substantiated statistically. Using the transcriptions of the taped interviews that are the substantive material of the study, many hypotheses can be tested statistically in the future.

The course was put together by a Women's Historian, a Folklorist, and the author to examine language. We decided to use the hypotheses set forth in Robin Lakoff's article that appeared in Language in Society (1972): there is traditional language of women, there is traditional language used to talk about women, language reflects women's place in society and the language is changing. Because we wanted to offer the course to undergraduates, we chose a common historical time and an uncluttered research methodology using life history type interviews and easily assessable subjects. After six or eight semesters we hoped to have conducted a study that was cross-age, cross occupational, cross ethnic and across economic lines. With a time focus for each semester, the historian was able to prepare lectures and reading assignments that would give the students a feel for the period in which the men and women the students were to interview had functioned. The contextual orientation also helped the students revise the interview guide provided by the folklorist so that questions for the interviews were specifically tied to the designated period of time. The course was divided into three segments: acquiring skills, interviewing and transcribing, and reporting. All the students who finished the course were women.

The specific interviewing techniques taught were those set forth in Dr. Edward Ives' book, A Manual for Fieldworkers (1974), and Interviewing by Gordan (1969). The types of questions asked by the interviewer were to get the interviewee to volunteer what was foremost in his or her recollections. Along with techniques of interviewing the student was taught to operate tape recorders, cataloging, and how to keep a useful journal.

During the segment of the course devoted to fieldwork, the students held interviews with a number of men and women in order to ascertain their appropriateness as subjects. The criteria used to determine appropriateness were: at least 70 years old, born in Maine, willingness to participate, and possible value of their experiences in building a history of Maine for that period. Once the student chose a man and a woman to interview, the student conducted a preliminary interview with each, going through the areas of family background, community, education, leisure time activities, courting, aspirations, marriage, family, jobs, involvement or reaction to the suffrage movement, wars, prohibition, depression, and the interviewee's special contribution or job. After going over the notes from the preliminary interview recorded in a "journal" with one of the faculty, the student held a second interview. This interview was taped. This interview focused on those aspects which the student and faculty person agreed would best illuminate the woman or man's uniqueness. The interviews lasted an average of one and a half hours. The student then catalogued and transcribed the interviews. These materials were then used by each student to examine lexicon, syntax, non-verbal cues, referential context, and attitude toward self. The students wrote a paper describing the individuals interviewed, his or her special contributions, a report of the language analysis, and con-

clusions about the Lakoff hypotheses.

What follows will be a description of the material collected.

THE MEN

The 12 men interviewed included a carpenter-fisherman, a chemist-inventor, a retired Dean of Men, a physician, a former State Legislator, a blind poet, a woodsman, a milkman, an iceman-historian, a retired Registrar, a businessman, an auctioneer-historian. Ages were 73 to 90. All of the men came from rural or small town backgrounds. The education ranged from fifth grade through several advanced degrees. All of the men had been married. Wives were not present and the students did not ask whether the wives were living. Occasionally the men volunteered this information when asked if they were married. It is interesting to note that the men had to be asked about their wives and/or families. Words used to describe wives were: a good woman; a motherly soul; homemaker; having great built-in strength; willing to do for the family; working out now and then; prettiest nurse in the hospital; her eyes were so black--they were the same color as my wife's eyes; I always consulted her; a natural born mother; woman's place was in the home. Never once did the men refer to their wives by name. None of them mentioned their wives in relation to society or careers. In referring to family and/or home, the men used "my" and "mine." Some interesting statements were made in conjunction with women's suffrage. The wife of one of the men interviewed was a registered Republican and he was a registered Democrat. The wife did not vote because the two votes would cancel each other. The man voted. Only one man spoke of men and women being equal and felt that World War II was women's emancipation. One of the men felt "...that a woman could take her place in the home and also vote on national issues." Only one man referred to women by

their full names without the use of "Mrs." Most often women were referred to as Mrs. White, or the wife of Professor White; or the minister's wife, or doctor's wife, or storekeeper's wife. Women were referred to in relation to a man. Men were looked upon as providers and protectors. When a father died, one of the men said, "The mother had to work pretty hard to maintain the house, " she "struggled" and "managed." Men "provided," women "managed." Only once did a man use "woman" in a sexual context, "...sometimes I used to go down to Bangor--I had a woman there--girl that I used to..." One man described his mother as "smart and shrewd." When the men talked about females, they used "woman." "Lady" seemed to be used to designate class as was also true of "gentleman." The word "girl" was used to designate age or lack of maturity. The Dean of Men referred to the college women as "girls." "Girls" was used to refer to women in stores. Women who worked in factories were referred to as "girls" also. The word "boy" or "boys" was used to designate age. It's interesting to note that the blind poet referred to his World War I comrades as "boys." "Lady doctor" and "woman doctor" were used. One man ventured, "Women doctors didn't do that well because they were ladies and weren't supposed to be doctors." The use of color terms was few and far between. The colors used were red, black, white, brown, green, yellow, blue. One man used "rosey." Some men used many particles and others used few. Those used most often were: Oh, well; so and, Oh, Lord; Oh, gracious. These are neutral particles. Perhaps "Oh, gracious" would be considered feminine in other regions, but doesn't seem to have that connotation in Maine. One of the men interviewed was a "downeaster" and used particles that were regional. These included, "Well-sir, by gracious, I gorry, by jove, golly, that is, good god, Oh-my gorry, aye gracious, my gorry." The down-

easter used a great variety and number of evaluative adjectives, 63 different ones, many of them regional. The majority of the men spoke concisely using few evaluative adjectives. The evaluative adjectives used most often referred to size: big, large, little, enormous, great. Regionalism may be involved in the use of "awful" and "pretty" instead of "very" or "so." It was interesting to note that the more highly educated men did use "so" and "very." One of the women interviewed offered this explanation: "One always said that something was awful nice, not very nice. If a woman used "very," then she was accused of putting on airs." This seems an explanation for the "class" difference in the use of "awful" by men also.

This brings us to the tag question. The men interviewed did not use the tag question frequently. One example of a tag in one interview came over the discussion of the voting age. The man said, "Oh, I think it's eighteen now, isn't it? A phenomenon appeared that needs to be looked at in context to decide whether it is a tag-type question. That is the use of "you know." Even though it has become habitual for some people to use "you know" almost as a vocalized pause I believe its use is a plea for validation. The woodsman who was interviewed talked about lumbering utilizing specialized jargon. In the beginning of the interview the interviewer would stop him and ask what he meant when he used an unfamiliar tern such as: pickpole, peavey, cant dog. This was routine toward the beginning of the interview and resulted in the man interjecting or using "you know" at the end of sentences to be sure the woman understood him. At one point, the woodsman said, "We went across in a canoe. You know what a canoe is, don't you?"

The men who were interviewed were sure of themselves and what they had done. It was important that they feel this way about themselves

at the age of 70+. Their sureness came across in their intonations patterns. There was an unmistakable firmness to their voices. They held strong opinions. Most of them were concise, without embellishments. The exceptions were the downeaster, the chemist, the historian, and the physician whose language was declarative but had a wide variety of vocabulary choices that seemed to be based on education and being widely read. The blind poet's speech tone was monotonous and his vocabulary unimaginative until he began to recite his poems.

Even the one man whose responses were somewhat slow and hesitant spoke firmly and without qualifiers.

Overall the men seemed to be at ease and secure in the interview situation.

The men interviewed indicated women's place in society through the use of the word "her" to apply to prized possessions, such as boats, watches, and cars, and in one instance, a sum of money.

The words "old maid," "spinster" were not used by the men. On one occasion the word "bachelor" was used "--a mean ugly fella." The word "master" was used in "master builder." Two interesting combinations were used by one man: "lady who was the postmistress" and "woman who is the postmaster there now."

THE WOMEN

The 16 women interviewed were difficult to slot into occupational designations. Many of the women had lives that could be divided into three phases: before marriage, marriage, and beyond marriage. An example of this is a woman who worked as a secretary, married, and then at the age of 60 was elected to the State Legislature. Knowing the difficulty of slotting these women into a single occupation, the women interviewed included: cook in lumber camps--wife--worker in sardine

factory--school bus driver--tax collector; teacher--wife--town clerk--tax collector; Dean of Women--founder of AAUW in Maine; secretary--wife--State Legislator; teacher--wife--principal; wife--nurse; farmwife; wife of chief of staff to the Governor--housemother--author; wife--volunteer; Recorder at Maine--world traveler; store clerk--wife--domestic--waitress; traveler--mother--teacher on Taipei--volunteer; telephone operator--wife; professor--writer--wife--founder of international children's organization; teacher--wife--volunteer. The youngest woman was 74 and the oldest 93. Most of the women came from rural or small-town backgrounds. Education ranged from sixth grade through one Ph.D. The women as a group had more formal education than the men interviewed. Three women had certificates to teach from normal schools, two had degrees from four-year colleges, two had graduated from business school, one had an R.N., one had an M.A., and one had a Ph.D. plus study in Berlin. Teaching was the majority occupation and all of the occupations were "women's work." If the women had been married, they usually volunteered the information. Two of the women never married, one was divorced, and the rest were widowed. In one case of a widowed woman, the interviewer did not know the name of the interviewee other than: Mrs. Paul Jones. When referring to family and home, the women used the words: we, ours, us. As with the men interviewed, women were identified with their husbands: men in the Legislature and their wives; Mr. William Chapman and wife. The women expressed the same perceptions of women's place: women are women and their place is in the home...with their children: I think women are making fools of themselves now--why don't they stay home and take care of their families; it didn't take me away from home--I was only away from home one night on account of it (volunteer work). None of the women actively involved in the suffrage movement. They were glad enough to

get the vote but did not campaign or attend rallies although one woman did hear Carrie Chapman Catt speak in Boston. To make a public show just wasn't done. Once they were given the vote, each of the women felt it was her duty to vote and did so. Two women worked actively for prohibition. As a matter of fact, one was elected to the State Legislature on prohibition as her only issue. One of the women who was elected town clerk shortly after women could vote told a story that indicated the attitude toward women in office:

> But Mr. Young didn't understand about that. He was so deaf. And I don't know what happened, but that year there was a lot of people that dogs came with them. There wasn't any ban on dogs running around then. And, ah, course when I went in as Town Clerk and went up on the platform where the moderator sat, you know, to keep the records, I suppose it kind of confused Mr. Young. And when it was (chuckles) over that day, he said it was the only town meeting he'd ever been to run by women and dogs. (#999.1, p. 4)

This same person who was Town Clerk and Tax Collector for 40 years in a small coastal community explained her election, "I think they were kind of hard up." "...The man who'd had it for two years before hadn't done a very good job. I guess they thought they better put a woman in."

The women interviewed seemed to be women who were quietly strong, fulfilling their duties toward home, institutions, and society at large. One woman described men as "strong and brilliant." Women were able, lovely, wonderful and showed strength of character.

The women also used the word "woman" not "lady." Once again, as with the men, "lady" was most often a class distinction. An interesting use of the word lady is in, "There, young lady, you won't get out of that! (punishment)" "Girls" was used to designate childhood and immaturity and jobs of less importance. One woman used the word "ladies clubs" and "little get-togethers" to designate women's clubs. Another woman described women who belonged to the League of Women Voters as "the

nicest, finest women" and "the most intelligent women." There was an interesting progression in the use of words for unmarried females by one of the women interviewed. In speaking of women who had General Chamberlain run their estates after their parents died, the interviewee referred to them first as "unmarried ladies," next as "lone women," and last as "old maids." One of the women said it wasn't until she was 24 and "teased of being an old maid" that she met her husband.

The use of color terms was almost nonexistent. The colors mentioned were white, black, brown, blue, red. Particles included the neuter "well" and "oh." Particles which were more feminine used by the women included: Oh-heavens, Good heavens, Oh yes--quite, Oh-Dear, My goodness, Oh my--I'm telling you! Oh-boy, Oh-my land." More masculine type particles were also used: Oh Lord, By Gorry, Lordy. There were phrases used as introductory to sentences that qualified statements, ideas, and/or opinions that were not present in the speech of the men interviewed: "I don't think so; I don't know as they did; perhaps; I suppose; I don't know; I think so: course; perhaps I'm not telling the whole truth as it should be told, but; I just feel; it seems to me." The speech of the woman Ph.D. was filled with this type of introductory qualifiers: "probably; I don't know; I think I was; I don't know why; I would think so; I think; what shall I say; as I interpret it; I don't know; of course; I wasn't there; you see; seem to; to me." The use of these qualifying statements at the beginning of sentences established the labels hesitant and tentative and polite as characteristic of the speech of a number of the women. Adding to this was the use of tag questions or tag-like phrases at the ends of sentences: "I never learned to drive, isn't that silly" I don't think men should be so domineering in the home, do you? Well, most people would say marriage, wouldn't they? But she was brave, wasn't she? Men had to take it, didn't they? It was my

grandmother, wasn't it? ... and then twenty-nine you see, was the big crash--Wall Street crash, remember? Sounds like eighty-six, doesn't it (her age)? ...you don't remember the Auditorium probably?" The use of "See?" "Do you see?" and "you know" was much more extensive among the women interviewed. These words are a call for validation by the interviewee and caused the speech to sound more tentative and unsure. Characteristic of women's speech was the use of evaluative adjectives. The word often used to describe this aspect of women's speech is the word "flowery" as differentiated from the downeaster's speech that was "colorful." Feminine evaluative adjectives used by the women interviewed were: lovely, delightful, wonderful, nice, pretty, pathetic, pretty little, smartly uniformed, cute, dearest, gently, gaily, beautifully, loveliest, very-very, devoted, meek, perfectly wonderful, stylish. The use of the word "awful" or "pretty" rather than "very" or "so" was used by most of the women interviewed. The exceptions were class and education. The Ph.D. used evaluative adjectives like: "vivid, entertaining, influential, sincerely, repetitious, creative, meaningful, enthusiastic and developmental." Many of these were preceded with "very" or "very-very" or "so." In between the vocabulary of the Ph.D. and the matter of fact farm woman, was the speech of the women whose lives were spent working under men or with men. The speech of these women--the Legislator, the Tax Collector, the nurse, the Dean of Women--was sterile. Evaluative adjectives, feminine particles, qualifiers, were missing. Robin Lakoff wrote about women being damned if they used women's language and damned if they used men's language. The way out for a group of women was to use a neutral-sexless language. An excellent description of the speech of the woman legislator by the interviewer follows:

If there is such a person as a man's woman, A.C.

> is that person. She is positive without being aggressive, verbal but not wordy, and there is no obvious sexuality; she could compete with men on even terms and not threaten them.

There were more hesitancies, vocalized pauses, lip-smacking, coughing, throat clearing among the women interviewed. The most uhs, ahs, and repetitions were in the speech of the woman Ph.D. She had ten vocalized pauses per page of transcription.

This hesitancy and tentativeness was particularly evident when the women talked about their particular contribution. Often the women would say she did what she had to do and did the best within the limits she had set for herself. The women were soft spoken. Everything about the verbal and non-verbal language of most of the women was an acceptance of a second-class status and the accomplishing of their special contributions was because their husbands tolerated it so long as they were home to get dinner or because some male had hired them or married them.

SUMMARY and CONCLUSIONS

Based on the information presented in this paper, certain generalizations can be made about the Lakoff hypotheses as they relate to 28 men and women born around 1900 in Maine.

There is a traditional language of women. It is more "evaluative-flowery," more polite, more tentative, more qualified. Some women have resorted to a sterile, neutral language. The men interviewed, even if their voices were low and speech a little hesitant, spoke in absolutes, without qualifiers and few tag questions.

Although there is a traditional language used to talk about women, these women and men did not use this traditional language to talk about women to a great extent. Particularly noticeable was the use of the word "woman" to designate mature females. "Lady" was not used as a euphemism for woman as Lakoff suggested.

Language reflects women's place in society. This was manifest

not so much in word choice as calls for validation, the use of qualifiers, the attitude that women's work outside the home is less important than men's.

The traditional language used to talk about women by the men and women born in Maine around 1900 defined women and their expected role. The traditional language used by women born in Maine around 1900 reinforced these definitions. These two factors seemed to result in a low self-concept which may indeed be part of the accepted image and role of women born in Maine around 1900.

The work on these transcriptions and tapes along with others have been accumulating at the Northeast Archives of Folklore and Oral History has just begun and if financial assistance is granted to the project from outside the University, some highly sophisticated data will be available for study.

I would like to end by sharing with you an example which seems to lend importance to language and self image. The woman Ph.D. came from a family of all females except for her father who was a physician. As a child she traveled with her father in his horse and buggy when he made house calls. She was called, "Little Doctor White." The 74 year old Dr. White Brown had a definition of herself through language that was missing in the background of the other women we interviewed.